

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

El Paso

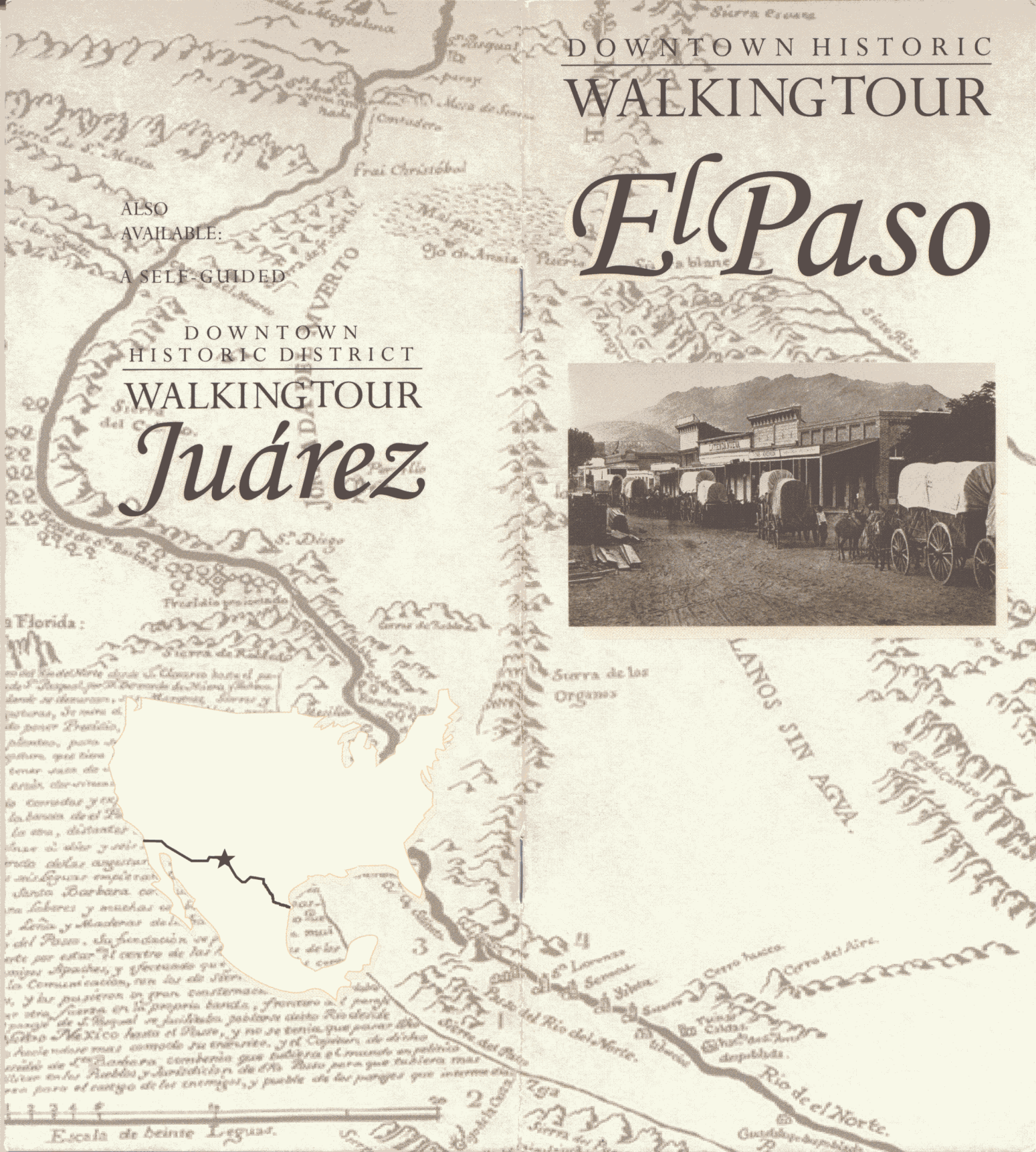
ALSO
AVAILABLE:

A SELF-GUIDED

DOWNTOWN
HISTORIC DISTRICT

WALKING TOUR

Juárez



A SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR

EL PASO'S DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT



EL PASO STREET LOOKING SOUTH (1885)

Welcome to the Self-Guided Walking Tour of El Paso's Downtown Historic District. This tour takes you on a stroll to historic architectural landmarks and sites, some noted with historic markers.

The self-guided walking tour, (about 90 minutes) begins in the southwest corner of San Jacinto Plaza, (at the antique clock). Keep in mind that this brochure is organized to provide descriptions of historic structures. A later leg of the tour will take you by the same structures but across the street, for a panoramic view.

Historic El Paso

The Rodriguez-Chamuscado expedition of 1581, the first party of Spaniards to arrive at what would soon be known as the Pass of the North, marks the beginning of four hundred years of history in the El Paso area.

Seventeen years later, on April 30, 1598, Juan de Oñate, standing on the banks of the Rio Grande near present-day San Elizario, celebrated the nation's First Thanksgiving and took formal possession of the land for his King, Phillip II of Spain. On May 4, 1598, at a site in the vicinity of present-day Hart's Mill, Oñate's expedition crossed the river and headed north to colonize the area that would later become Santa Fe. Oñate called this operation "El Paso del Rio del Norte," meaning the crossing of the river.

FRONT COVER: A WAGON TRAIN FROM MEXICO ON SOUTH EL PASO STREET (1882)

After a hundred years of settlement in Santa Fe, a revolt of the Pueblo Indians on August 10, 1680, brought Spanish settlers, missionaries and Tigua and Piro Indians to the El Paso river valley. Later that same year, the Spanish established two new missions at Ysleta and Socorro. The Chapel San Elizario was established in 1789 as part of a Spanish presidio, or military fort.

In 1827, Juan Maria Ponce de León, a well known resident of El Paso del Norte (Ciudad Juárez) obtained a land grant of 211 acres on the north bank of the Rio Grande. After acquiring additional acreage, Ponce de León started to build a ranch on what is now the site of the Plaza Theatre and old White House Building. The ranch became a thriving agricultural and ranching enterprise. Ponce's Rancho thus became El Paso's original name.

The outbreak of the U.S.-Mexico War in 1846 and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 established the Rio Grande as the border between Mexico and the United States. The western boundary extended to the Pacific Ocean. A military post called "The Post Opposite El Paso" and later named Fort Bliss followed in 1848.

Ponce de León sold his ranch for \$18,000 in 1849 to a trader and early businessman, Benjamin Franklin Coons, who built a general store. The settlement became known as Franklin. By the 1850's there were four settlements north of the river: Franklin, located in what is now downtown; Concordia and Magoffinsville, just east of downtown; and Hart's Mill to the west. In 1853 the land was again sold to William T. Smith for \$10,000. It then becomes known as Smith's Ranch, although the name Franklin was still used. In 1854, Franklin was a small village of adobe houses, scattered along an old trail now called El Paso Street, stretching from the plaza to the river crossing. Cottonwood-lined acequias (irrigation ditches) crossed the community to the fields and orchards of grapes, peaches, and apricots.

The Mexican side of the Rio Grande, El Paso del Norte (today's Ciudad Juárez) was the big town and had an

estimated population of 4,000 people. A ferry provided active commerce between the two communities.

In 1859, William T. Smith sold the ranch to several buyers who selected Anson Mills to survey 50 acres into a town site or town plat. Mills named the principal streets for the stage routes of the Butterfield Overland Mail Line and the San Antonio and San Diego Mail Co. El Paso Street was named because it led south to El Paso del Norte. With the city plat approved in 1859, Mills changed the town's name from Franklin (Smith's Ranch) to El Paso. City government for El Paso was established in 1873. During the same time frame, Pioneer Plaza, at the north end of El Paso Street, was considered the center of town. In 1881, the railroads arrived in El Paso bringing rapid development and growth. The sleepy adobe village of 400 people soon became a bustling community with wood and brick structures replacing adobe.

On September 16, 1888, the name of El Paso del Norte (across the river) was changed to Ciudad Juárez in honor of one of Mexico's great heroes, Benito Juárez.

Downtown Historic District

The original downtown commercial district began at Pioneer Plaza. Today's El Paso Street became a trail to Juárez at Paisano Drive. By 1890, this business core began to expand northeast to San Antonio, Mills, and Texas Avenues. The 1910's, '20's, '30's and '50's were the decades of the construction of major buildings, which are still part of the El Paso skyline. In the mid-1960's, the downtown area began to decline, while the city limits greatly expanded to keep up with the population increase. The construction of Interstate 10 only encouraged rapid growth of the city away from downtown. The new bridges to Mexico were also built at that time as the result of the Chamizal Treaty. The termination of the international streetcar service and the peso devaluation of the 1970's all contributed to the shrinking of the downtown retail market.

During the 1960's and 1970's new bank high rise

buildings strengthened downtown's hold as a financial and governmental center. A new city hall and convention center were developed to the west of this core. A new federal building, county jail, and county courthouse completed this era of construction.

Many of the buildings described below were restored or rehabilitated in the 1980's and '90's.

*** Signifies buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places.**

1. SAN JACINTO PLAZA



ALLIGATOR POND, SAN JACINTO PLAZA (Ca. 1910)

Today's San Jacinto Plaza was once the site of the corrals for Ponce de León's ranch. A public square was donated to the town and in 1903 the City Council named it San Jacinto Plaza. The City contracted with Fisher Satterthwaite to create beauty out of this desert patch. He surrounded the park with a fence, created a walled pond, erected a gazebo and planted 75 Chinese Elm trees. He also introduced three alligators into the pond. The reptiles thrived. The plaza has experienced several remodelings since its origination. In 1967, the pond was removed and the alligators placed in the City Zoo. Many people still fondly refer to the plaza as "La Plaza de los Lagartos," or Alligator Plaza. Today, a fiberglass sculpture by nationally acclaimed local artist Luis Jimenez honors the original alligators.

Historical markers located at the Plaza include El Camino Real, El Paso County C.S.A., 1848-1948 Fort Bliss Centennial, and San Jacinto Plaza.

⇒ Walk west from San Jacinto Plaza to the Mills Building. Cross Oregon Street at the traffic signal (crosswalk provided).

2. THE MILLS BUILDING

(1910-1911) 303 North Oregon Street



THE MILLS BUILDING (Ca. 1920-1930)

The Mills Building stands on the original site of the 1832 Ponce de León ranch. Anson Mills hired architect Henry C. Trost, El Paso's foremost pioneer architect, to design and construct the building. Completed in 1911, it was one of the largest all-concrete buildings then constructed. In its massing and detailing the building reflects the influence of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. The architectural firm of Trost and Trost moved its offices there, where they remained until 1920. The Mills family sold the building in 1965 and in 1974, the building underwent extensive exterior renovation.

Historical markers located here include Chinatown and the Mills Building.

⇒ Walk west along Mills Avenue to the marquee at the entrance to the Plaza Theatre.

3. THE CENTRE (OLD WHITE HOUSE DEPARTMENT STORE AND HOTEL McCOY)*

(1912) 123 Pioneer Plaza

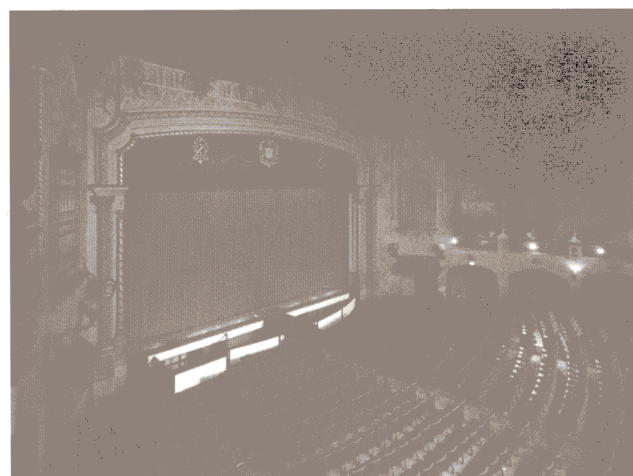


WHITE HOUSE DEPARTMENT STORE AND HOTEL McCOY (Ca. 1912)

The Centre, formerly the White House Department Store and Hotel McCoy, is an elegant essay in white terra-cotta in the Chicago Commercial Style as designed by Henry C. Trost. Opened in 1912, the first floor and basement housed the store and the hotel occupied the other six floors. The building was renovated into office space in 1985.

4. PLAZA THEATRE *

(1930) 125 Pioneer Plaza



PLAZA THEATRE (1988)

The Plaza Theatre, with its Spanish Colonial architectural style, was designed by architect W. Scott Dunn and opened on September 12, 1930, to a capacity

crowd of 2,410. The Plaza started as a vaudeville house and graduated to movies. The theatre features an atmospheric ceiling complete with twinkling stars and lazily floating clouds and was the first public theatre in the United States with air conditioning. Through the years, the Plaza hosted such popular entertainers as Sarah Bernhardt, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, the Barrymore family, Sally Rand, Tallulah Bankhead, Hopalong Cassidy, John Wayne, the Marx Brothers, Rita Moreno, Henry Fonda, Tom Mix, and Jimmy Stewart. The Plaza closed in 1974, and was briefly reopened in 1976 and 1985, only to finally close its doors in 1989. One of relatively few remaining theatres of its kind in the country, plans are under way to restore the Plaza to its original splendor.)

⇒ *Now cross Mills Avenue at the traffic signal (crosswalk provided) to the Plaza Hotel and Pioneer Plaza.*

5. THE PLAZA HOTEL (FORMERLY THE HILTON HOTEL)* (1929-1930) 106 Mills Avenue



THE HILTON (PLAZA) HOTEL (Ca.1938)

The hotel was constructed on the site of the Sheldon Hotel, which burned in 1929. The Sheldon served as the unofficial headquarters for many of the participants in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920's) from both sides of the border. In the fall of 1929, Conrad Hilton began

the construction of his first high-rise hotel. Nineteen days later the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. Despite everything, construction continued. The hotel opened on November 30, 1930, in one of the worst periods in American history. The Plaza Hotel is significant because it is one of El Paso's early steel frame, high-rise setback structures designed by architect Henry C. Trost. The style is Art Deco, and the exterior remains largely unaltered from its original form. Elizabeth Taylor briefly lived in the penthouse of the hotel after she married Conrad's son Nicky. The hotel was sold in 1963 and the name changed to the Plaza Hotel.

Historical markers located on the Plaza Hotel include the First Kindergarten in Texas and The Woman's Club of El Paso.

6. PIONEER PLAZA

Mills Avenue at El Paso Street

Pioneer Plaza was the hub of public activity in early El Paso. A United States military guard was posted here in the late 1870's to defend citizens from Apache Indian attacks, and military bands performed in this small plaza. An irrigation ditch flowed along the south boundary of the plaza and nourished a line of trees, which shaded the area. One became known as the "Newspaper Tree" on which public notices were posted. Major roads and trails passed through the plaza. United States President William H. Taft and Mexican President Porfirio Díaz each passed through the plaza en route to the Chamber of Commerce building for their historic meeting on October 16, 1909. Due to its size, Pioneer Plaza was replaced by the larger San Jacinto Plaza as the center of community activities. As the first of the 12 Travelers sculptures, the City of El Paso dedicated the Fray García de San Francisco sculpture in September 1996. It was this Franciscan friar who, in 1662, inaugurated the first mission, Our Lady of Guadalupe, in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

Historical markers located in Pioneer Plaza include El Paso, El Paso's First Newspaper, Fray García de San Francisco, and Pioneer Plaza.

⇒ *Now retrace your steps and cross Mills Avenue at the intersection with S. El Paso Street to the Camino Real Hotel (crosswalk provided).*

7. CAMINO REAL HOTEL (FORMERLY THE PASO DEL NORTE HOTEL) *

(1912) 101 South El Paso Street



PASO DEL NORTE (CAMINO REAL) HOTEL (Ca. 1912)

Zach T. White first envisioned his hotel in 1892, but it was not until 1912 that the hotel was completed. He hired Henry C. Trost and together they studied the structures in San Francisco which had withstood the Great Earthquake of 1906. They designed a brick, steel and terra-cotta building with interior walls made of gypsum from nearby White Sands, New Mexico, that was not only structurally sound but fireproof as well. The interior of the hotel was the most elegant in the area. The ornate lobby includes a 25-foot Tiffany stained glass dome and scagliola (simulated marble) pillars. A round relief sculpture signed "H. C. Trost" is the only signed work by the architect. The roof top ballroom was a favorite place to gather and watch the progress of the Mexican Revolution across the river. The hotel became the headquarters for cattlemen and ranchers and claimed that more head of cattle were bought or sold in its lobby than at any other single location in the world.

Over the years, the building has undergone several remodelings, the most recent of which was in 1986 when the 17-story tower was added and the old building was completely renovated and restored.

Historical Markers located here include A City is Born, Hotel Paso del Norte, The Death of a Marshall, Four Men Shot Dead.

⇒ *Continue south on S. El Paso Street and cross the intersection with San Antonio Avenue (crosswalk provided).*

8. PALACE THEATRE *

(1914) 209 South El Paso Street



ALHAMBRA (PALACE) THEATRE (1914)

The Palace Theatre, originally called the Alhambra, opened on August 1, 1914. It was designed by architect Henry C. Trost to be used either as a playhouse for live theatre or as a movie house. The theatre displays a Spanish Colonial format with Moorish influence, with the façade exhibiting a delicate overall tracery of Arabesque. Although it has been significantly altered inside for use as a nightclub, the original character of the building can still be seen.

⇒ *Continue south on S. El Paso Street and cross Overland Avenue (crosswalk provided).*

9. MERRICK BUILDING, ST. CHARLES HOTEL (HOLLYWOOD CAFE)

(1887) 301 South El Paso Street

El Paso architects John J. Stewart and William J. Carpenter erected the Merrick Building in 1887. It later became the Hollywood Café in 1931. The St. Charles Hotel was the longest continuously operating hotel in El Paso until 1996. The complete restoration of the building in 2000 included apartments on the upper floors. The ground floor continues to be operated for retail purposes.



ST. CHARLES HOTEL (Ca. 1905)

⇒ *Continue the tour by crossing to the east side at Overland Avenue and proceed north.*

10. STAGE STATION

(1858) 300 South El Paso Street, (See the granite Texas Historical Centennial Marker)

El Paso functioned as a major stage line terminal and included the San Antonio and San Diego "Jackass" Mail Company, whose operation extended from San Antonio through El Paso to San Diego and the Butterfield Overland Mail Company, which extended from St. Louis, Missouri, to San Francisco, California.

In 1858, Anson Mills was commissioned by the Butterfield Company to build its El Paso stage station. The station served as the dividing point between the Eastern and Western divisions of the 2,700-mile route, which would span the longest distance over which coach service had ever been attempted. Completed in September, 1858, the Overland building was the largest and best-equipped station on the Overland route, and the most imposing structure in El Paso.

The Civil War and the consequent removal of the troops stationed at forts along the stage road brought the Butterfield stage to an abrupt halt in March, 1861. During and after the Civil War, the building served a variety of purposes including a Confederate Army Hospital in 1862, U.S. Army Barracks (1878-1880) and saloon. Stage passengers and mail continued on the San Antonio-El Paso mail line under various contractors, using the stage station located at a site occupied now by the Plaza Hotel and Kress Building. Stage travel virtually disappeared altogether with the arrival of the railroads in 1881. The stage station was demolished in 1898.



STAGE STATION OF THE OVERLAND MAIL CO. (1859)

⇒ *Continue north on S. El Paso Street by crossing the intersection with Overland Avenue (crosswalk provided).*

11. FALSE FRONT (DAVE'S PAWN SHOP)

(Ca. 1881-1882) 216-218 South El Paso Street

Dave's Pawn Shop is El Paso's last surviving false-front structure. The one-part commercial building is a simple box with a decorated wood façade and cornice. The architectural style of small, pitched-roof buildings with false fronts created the commercial core of the new western towns during the mid-19th century. The original decorative cornice can still be seen above the remodeled store front. See cover photograph.

⇒ *Continue northbound on South El Paso St.*

DOWNTOWN HISTORIC SELF-GUIDED WALKING TOUR



- | | | | |
|------|----------------------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| 1.- | SAN JACINTO PLAZA | 15.- | OLD LERNER STORE |
| 2.- | MILLS BUILDING | 16.- | CAPLES BUILDING |
| 3.- | THE CENTRE | 17.- | POPULAR DEPARTMENT STORE |
| 4.- | PLAZA THEATRE | 18.- | O.T. BASSETT TOWER |
| 5.- | THE PLAZA HOTEL | 19.- | SINGER BUILDING |
| 6.- | PIONEER PLAZA | 20.- | MARTIN BUILDING |
| 7.- | CAMINO REAL HOTEL | 21.- | U.S. POST OFFICE |
| 8.- | PALACE THEATRE | 22.- | HOTEL CORTEZ |
| 9.- | MERRICK BUILDING,
ST. CHARLES HOTEL | 23.- | ABDOU BUILDING |
| 10.- | STAGE STATION | 24.- | ROBERTS-BANNER BUILDING |
| 11.- | FALSE FRONT | 25.- | S.H. KRESS BUILDING |
| 12.- | FIRST NATIONAL BANK | | |
| 13.- | WIGWAM THEATRE | | |
| 14.- | STATE NATIONAL BANK | | |

12. FIRST NATIONAL BANK (WELLS FARGO BUILDING)

(1882-1883)

202 South El Paso Street / 100 East San Antonio Avenue



FIRST NATIONAL BANK BUILDING (Ca. 1888)

The First National Bank Building was constructed in 1882-1883 for Joshua Reynolds, then President of the First National Bank in Las Vegas, New Mexico. Originally constructed as a two-story Italianate structure, the building was transformed into a Second Empire style in 1888 by adding a steeply pitched mansard roof, which serves as the walls of the top floor. The upper floors of the structure were originally leased for professional offices. Over the years tenants have included Wells Fargo and Co.'s Express, the *El Paso Herald* newspaper, and for a brief period, the law office of gunslinger and attorney John Wesley Hardin. Hardin's office was on the second floor, El Paso Street side, and probably the second window south from the intersection. The First National Bank vacated the property in 1914, when it merged with the American National Bank that same year.

⇒ *Continue the tour by turning east on E. San Antonio Avenue.*

13. WIGWAM THEATRE (WIGWAM SALOON)

(Ca. 1880) 108-110 East San Antonio Avenue

The present structure is the old Wigwam Saloon Building. During its heyday (1880's-1890's), it ranked as



WIGWAM THEATRE (Ca. 1912)

one of El Paso's top five prestigious saloons. The bar was at the street level. Gambling, since it was often illegal, was upstairs. A stairway extended from the second floor into the alley alongside (note bricked-up windows and doors). Constable and gunman John Selman, who killed John Wesley Hardin, exited to that alley in 1896 and was slain by Deputy U.S. Marshal George Scarborough. The building was redesigned by Henry C. Trost in 1912, for use as the Wigwam Theatre. It was later renamed the State Theatre which closed during the 1970's and the structure converted to retail space.

14. STATE NATIONAL BANK *

(1922) 118 East San Antonio Avenue



STATE NATIONAL BANK (Ca. 1956)

Founded in 1881 with the arrival of the railroads, the State National Bank was an important financial base throughout the growth and development of El Paso. This was the second building for the bank which

commissioned architect Henry C. Trost to design a handsome classic building, with careful detailing based on Roman and Italian Renaissance motifs entirely from terra-cotta. The State National Bank moved to a new building in 1962, and its old building sold to the Home Mortgage Company. The building eventually became retail space in the early 1990's.

⇒ *Continue by turning northbound on Oregon Street and crossing E. San Antonio Avenue at the intersection (crosswalk provided). Proceed east on E. San Antonio Avenue.*

15. OLD LERNER STORE (ACME SALOON)

227 East San Antonio Avenue



LOOKING WEST ON EAST SAN ANTONIO AVE. (Ca. 1950's)

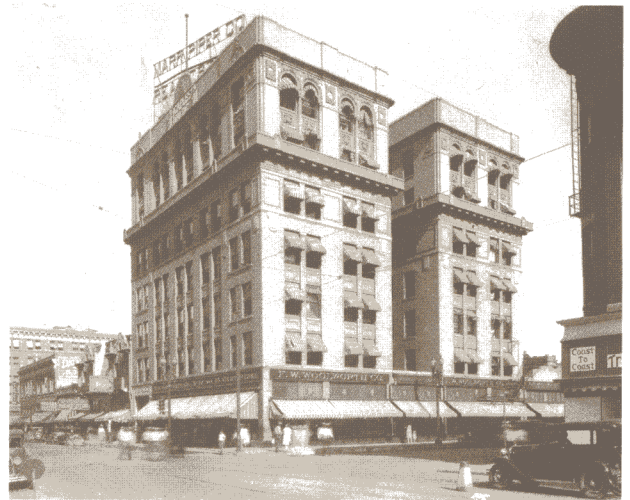
This northwest corner of Mesa Street and San Antonio Avenue is the site of the former Acme Saloon, and marks the beginning of the Parlor House District. The original unimposing building was wood and adobe, and had a doorway opening to the bar. On the night of August 19, 1895, gunslinger John Wesley Hardin was at the bar rolling dice for the drinks, then turned and said, "Brown, you have four sixes to beat." At that instant, John Selman elbowed through the batwing doors and shot Hardin in the head, killing him instantly.

An historical marker, John Wesley Hardin, is located here.

⇒ *Continue on E. San Antonio Avenue to the intersection with Mesa Street. At this corner look south to the Caples Building and down Mesa Street (formerly Utah Street) where El Paso's Parlor House District (brothels) once thrived. It was officially closed in 1938.*

16. CAPLES BUILDING *

(1909/1915-1916) 300 East San Antonio Avenue

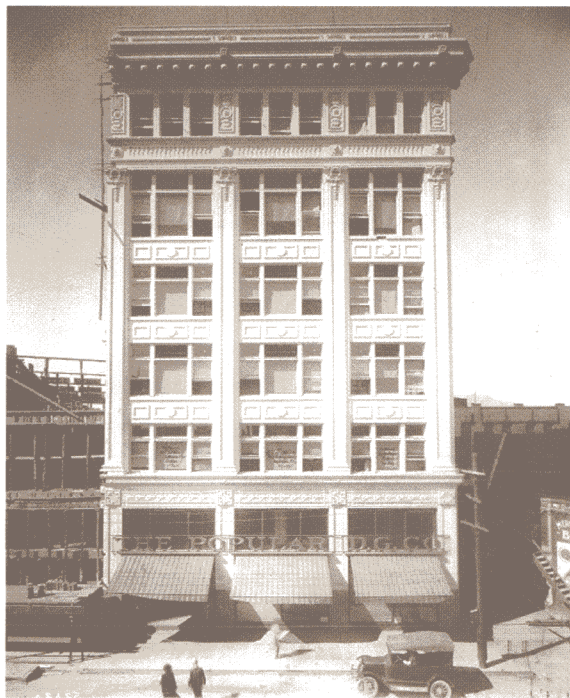


CAPLES BUILDING (Ca. 1920's)

Richard Caples, mayor of El Paso from 1889 to 1893, commissioned Henry C. Trost to design what would become El Paso's first reinforced concrete building. Originally five stories tall, two additional stories were added to the building in 1915-1916. Most of the principal façades were covered with brick, and the concrete shows only in the sparse use of ornamentation. During the Mexican Revolution the building housed the offices of various notable Mexican political figures. Revolutionary leaders, among them Abraham González, Cástulo Herrera, Pascual Orozco, Francisco Madero, and Francisco Villa made the building's uppermost stories their center of operations in El Paso throughout the 1910's. Madero plotted the pivotal revolutionary battle of Juárez in 1911 in the fifth floor offices where Abraham González had set up a revolutionary junta. Villa and Orozco organized volunteers and arms purchases there also. Dr. Ira Jefferson Bush, an American physician who subsequently assisted the Maderista armies' medical services, had his offices here. Journalists, among them Enrique and Ricardo Flores-Magón, the editors of the anti-Porfirista *La Regeneración* newspaper, also housed their offices here.

⇒ *Continue the tour by crossing Mesa Street and continuing on E. San Antonio Avenue.*

17. POPULAR DEPARTMENT STORE *
(1 UNION FASHION CENTER)
 (1912 and 1916) 102 North Mesa Street



THE POPULAR DRY GOODS CO. BUILDING, COMPLETED FIRST SECTION (1911)

The Popular Department Store is another design by architect Henry C. Trost in the Chicago Commercial Style using all white terra-cotta. Adolph Schwartz founded the Popular Dry Goods Company in 1902. The store first operated at a location at South El Paso and Overland streets, followed shortly by a move to the old Masonic Building formerly located at this site. The Popular, "La Popular," served the El Paso, southern New Mexico and Chihuahua region for 93 years.

An Historical marker designates this location as site of the First Masonic Lodge in El Paso.

⇒ *Continue on E. San Antonio Avenue, turn north on Stanton Street to the intersection with 222 Texas Avenue. From this intersection it is possible to view both the O.T. Bassett Tower and Singer Building. The tour continues north on Stanton Street by crossing Texas Avenue.*

18. O.T. BASSETT TOWER *
 (1929-1930) 301 Texas Avenue



O.T. BASSETT TOWER (1930)

Charles N. Bassett built the Bassett Tower in honor of his father, O.T. Bassett, a prominent El Pasoan who was one of the founders of the State National Bank. Henry C. Trost was commissioned to design the building.

Completed in 1930, the fifteen-story, setback skyscraper rises over a larger one-story base. The entrance is an elaborate display of Art Deco design elements including a frieze of plant designs in square plaques just above the ground story. Ten eagle sentries guard the 15th floor. The mustachioed face over the main entrance is reputed to be that of Henry C. Trost himself.

19. SINGER SEWING CO. BUILDING *
 (1928) 211-213 Texas Avenue

Designed by Henry C. Trost, the Singer Building is the only existing structure in the Downtown Historic District that illustrates Mediterranean architectural features with a balanced harmony of windows and walls.

An historical marker is located on the building.

20. MARTIN BUILDING

(1917) 215 North Stanton Street

This seven story commercial building was constructed in 1917. Designed by the architectural firm of Brauhon and Leibert, it features Chicago Commercial Style detailing in the use of decorative terra-cotta and large windows.

See historical marker located at main entrance.

⇒ *Cross the intersection at Mills Avenue (crosswalk provided) and turn west onto Mills Avenue.*

HENRY C. TROST

Henry C. Trost (1860-1933), who came to El Paso in 1903, was the primary designer for the architectural firm of Trost and Trost. He designed about 650 identifiable buildings in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, and the Mexican states of Chihuahua, Coahuila and Sonora. In addition to the downtown buildings, Trost's designs in El Paso include the original buildings at The University of Texas at El Paso, Loretto Academy, El Paso High School, La Tuna Federal Correctional Institution, and numerous single residences. He was a pioneer in the use of reinforced concrete and mastered every architectural style that was popular during his career.

21. U.S. POST OFFICE *

(1916 -1917) 219 Mills Avenue



U.S. POST OFFICE (Ca. 1960's)

This Post Office, located one block from the Plaza, is a

massively scaled public building designed by architect James A. Wetmore. Constructed in 1917, and in continuous operation since then, the two-story building is considered one of the most noteworthy eclectic Roman styles in far West Texas. It is reminiscent of turn of the century federal buildings in Washington D.C. With its dignified classical detailing and academic proportions, it still remains a strong visual landmark.

The building is of sandstone and concrete ashlar masonry and retains its original exterior wood windows; six giant ionic columns support the front portico. The interior lobby is a two-story space covered with a massive, paneled dome and a stained-glass skylight. Polished marble walls, ornamental grilles of bronze and original postal boxes adorn the interior walls of the lobby. The lobby's ceramic tile floor dates from 1960, and contains mosaic depictions of eight commemorative U.S. Postage stamps.

⇒ *Continue west to the corner of Mills Avenue at Mesa Street and pause for a panoramic view of the Caples, Abdou, Roberts-Banner buildings.*

22. CORTEZ BUILDING * (FORMERLY HOTEL CORTEZ)

(1926) 310 North Mesa Street



HOTEL CORTEZ (Ca. 1967)

The Hotel Cortez is the last of three hotels that have occupied this site. The earlier hotels included the Hotel Vendome and Hotel Orndorff, which was razed to make

room for the new Hotel Orndorff. The new hotel was designed by Henry C. Trost and opened on September 10, 1926. When it opened it was advertised as a "Castle of Old Spain on the Plaza of El Paso". The hotel was sold in 1935 and renamed Hotel Cortez.

The hotel is an elaborate representation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. One of the building's unique features is a series of portrait heads of conquistadors staring out of roundels above the first floor level. The hotel's most famous guest was President John F. Kennedy, who visited on June 5, 1963. The building continued to serve the lodging needs of El Paso until 1970 when it was leased to the El Paso Job Corps Center. In 1984, the building was restored and renovated into professional offices.

23. ABDOU BUILDING *

(1909-1910) 115 North Mesa Street



MESA STREET LOOKING SOUTH FROM MESA AND MILLS STREETS (Ca. 1915)
CAPLES BUILDING (C), ABDOU BUILDING (A), ROBERTS-BANNER BUILDING (R-B) (1910-1920)

Constructed in 1910 as the Rio Grande Valley Bank Building, the Abdou Building, as it is known today, was renamed after being purchased by prominent businessman Sam Abdou in 1925. Designed by Henry C. Trost, the beautifully detailed reinforced concrete building has no two sides parallel on the quadrilateral site. Today the building houses retail space.

24. ROBERTS-BANNER BUILDING *

(1908-1910) 215 North Mesa Street

The fourth concrete building by Henry C. Trost to

anchor the Plaza is a magnificent "U" shaped concrete structure with wonderful detailing. M.D. Roberts and W.M. Banner, prominent New Mexico stock raisers commissioned the structure.

⇒ *Continue the tour by crossing N. Mesa Street to San Jacinto Plaza and the antique clock where the tour began.*

25. S.H. KRESS BUILDING

(1938) 100 Mills Avenue



KRESS BUILDING (1938)

The Kress Building was designed by the company architect Edward Sibbert in 1938 for the S. H. Kress and Company which operated a five-and-ten-cent store at this location from 1938 until 1997. The El Paso store, together with New York City's Fifth Avenue store, were said to be Sibbert's favorite Kress stores. The building has three street elevations onto Mesa, Mills, and Oregon streets, unique among all the Kress stores. The building is a dramatic display of terra-cotta in oyster white with eight additional colors. A Kress Company leaflet described the building as "modified Spanish architecture to comply with a special request of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce that

we design a building in keeping with the colorful history of this locality." The principal feature, the corner tower, stands eighty feet high and makes reference to El Paso's layered history and cultural diversity. It includes an association with the tower that had graced the U.S. Federal Building (which had previously occupied this site), the bell tower of the Socorro Mission, and the square towers attached to mosques in Muslim Spain. Mayan architecture is an established theme on all three street elevations, supported strongly by the look of the block-like, stepped tower.

This is the end of the Self-Guided Walking tour of El Paso's Downtown Historic District.



BATAAN MEMORIAL TRAINWAY UNDER CONSTRUCTION (1948)

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ST. CHARLES HOTEL, PAGE 11, COURTESY OF GREATER EL PASO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

HILTON HOTEL, PAGE 8, COURTESY OF MIKE DIPP JR.

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